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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 000786

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NSC FOR ABRAMS/DORAN/WERNER/SINGH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 03/14/2016
TAGS: [KDEM](#) [PGOV](#) [KPAL](#) [LE](#) [SY](#)
SUBJECT: MGLE01: AMAL LEADER SATISFIED WITH LIMITED
PROGRESS AT DIALOGUE -- PRESIDENCY PUT ON HOLD

Classified By: CHRISTOPHER W. MURRAY, CHARGE. REASON: SECTION 1.4 (B)

¶1. (C) Amal member Ali Hamdan is pleased with the progress of the national dialogue to date. Hamdan, a close advisor to Parliament Speaker Nabih Berri, met with PolChief on 3/14 to discuss the meetings and his expectations for the next session. Hamdan said the Speaker would release a public statement March 14, the first authorized statement, to indicate how the dialogue was progressing. Two of Hamdan's perceptions remain unshaken by the session: 1) Saad Hariri is not in control of the March 14 Coalition; and 2) Michel Aoun is unwilling to step back from his presidential aspirations. According to Hamdan, those two factors combine to spell the likely continuation of Emile Lahoud's mandate.

Things are going well in the dialogue...

¶2. (C) Nabih Berri will issue a statement on the progress of the national dialogue on March 14. According to Hamdan, that statement will list progress on three agenda items: 1) the Hariri investigation; 2) Syrian-Lebanese relations, and 3) Palestinian arms outside of the camps. Hamdan was encouraged by the progress made in the dialogue on the questions of the Hariri investigation and Lebanese Syrian relations. He admitted that Syria's attitude would determine the success of any diplomatic initiatives, but Hamdan was satisfied that a Lebanese consensus on good relations with Syria, based on an exchange of ambassadors, was secured. He said his reading of recent Syrian statements indicated that the Syrians would probably agree with this decision. Hamdan said it was an easy matter for the session to come to the decision to support the extension of the UNIIIC mandate and the creation of a broadly mandated tribunal to look into the Hariri assassination and other crimes. The same was true Palestinian arms. The agreement that these arms had to be "organized" within six months was accepted by all the participants in the session and largely matches the GOL's official policy statement submitted by the prospective Siniora government this past summer.

¶3. (C) The issue of Sheba'a Farms was more difficult, according to Hamdan. He said that Walid Jumblatt is maintaining, with the help of maps, that Sheba'a is not Lebanese, but no other Lebanese figure, including Hariri, is prepared to support that notion. The consensus in the room seems to be that the Lebanese will call Sheba'a Lebanese and the international community must prove otherwise. Hamdan said Berri and others would try to change Jumblatt's mind for the sake of consensus.

But the dialogue will not

resolve the presidency

14. (C) The presidency continues to be the most important, and contentious, item on the dialogue agenda. Hamdan said he does not expect the group to reach any agreement on possible names of those who might replace President Lahoud, nor a set of objective criteria for the office. Speaking of the participants, he said that all of the Maronites in the room see themselves as candidates. No one will agree to anything that gives an advantage to another candidate. He described Aoun as obsessed with the presidency in an unhealthy way. Still, Hamdan was willing to say that the front-runners in the March 14 camp are Boutros Harb and Nasib Lahoud. He added that if Emile Lahoud finds out that his cousin Nasib is to replace him as president, Emile will never agree to leave office. Personal enmity between the two men would encourage President Lahoud to resist his ouster. Hamdan said Lebanon might need help from Syria to convince Lahoud to leave office early. He rejected PolChief's suggestion that this would be allowing Syria into Lebanese affairs through a back door. "They brought him. They can help remove him," Hamdan said.

15. (C) Hamdan said that he believes Lahoud has a good chance of serving out his term. The Patriarch is an unlikely ally in the effort to dislodge Lahoud, Hamdan said. He pointed out that the Maronite leader recently publicly chastised the PM for attempting to replace two Maronite members of an executive commission. "How can we expect him to support removing a president?" The impasse between Aoun and the March 14 movement serves Lahoud's interests. Although some have speculated that Lahoud wants assurances of his future before resigning from office, Hamdan rejects this notion. He also seemed to discount the frequently repeated

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assumption that Lahoud would leave office if he knew who would follow him. The disunity of the opposition to Lahoud, and the failure of the parliament to arrive at a consensus for his removal, make Lahoud more confident in his position. Hamdan added that if the coming international tribunal takes up corruption investigations, Lahoud would be further encouraged by the prospect of men like Boutros Harb being subject to international scrutiny for their financial dealings.

16. (C) Saad Hariri is as obsessed as is Aoun, according to Hamdan. He believes Hariri is obsessed with the office of Prime Minister. In fact, Hamdan mused that PM Siniora and President Lahoud had a common goal, to remain in office in the face of March 14 movement pressure. However, Hamdan said he doubted Hariri's abilities to lead. "He is not a good majority leader. How can he be a good prime minister?" The March 14 deadline for Lahoud's departure, Hamdan claimed, is evidence of his failure to control elements in his own party. He believes Hariri has ceded power to Walid Jumblatt and Jumblatt's colleague MP Ghazin Aridi. Hamdan said Hariri rejects Aoun as a candidate on what seems to be personal grounds. he claimed that Hariri's alliance with other Maronites precludes him from supporting a particular candidate at this time. "If he names one, he loses several," Hamdan pointed out.

MURRAY